

# Newsletter of the MASON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Mason, Ohio

and Alverta Green Museum

August 2020

The Mason Historical Society and Alverta Green Museum are located in the heart of downtown Mason, Ohio. Established over 40 years ago, the Society's aim is to create, promote and preserve the history and heritage of Mason.

For more information, call 513.398.6750, visit our website at [masonhistoricalsociety.org](http://masonhistoricalsociety.org) or friend us on Facebook.

Visit us at:  
207 W. Church St.  
Mason, Ohio

**REGULAR HOURS**  
1 pm - 4 pm  
Thursday and Friday  
First Saturday of the Month  
10 am - 1 pm  
and by appointment

## R.S. HAGEMAN

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

### Mason's First School Superintendent

Ralph Stout Hageman was born in 1837. His parents came here from New Jersey. He attended district schools and by age 16 became a minister. Over time he performed many marriages and funerals in the village.

In 1857 he became a teacher at Students Hall. Hageman was known to teach in a way that was interesting and easy to understand. After 15 years, he retired from teaching to become a farmer.

About that time the school board had decided they needed a competent person to oversee the district schools. So, in 1877 Hageman was chosen to be the new superintendent of all seven district schools. His duties included making four visits each year to each school for which he was paid \$3 per day.

Apparently, Hageman's tenure as superintendent only lasted about eight years as in 1886, Louis Coleman was noted as school superintendent attending the school's first high school graduation.

One of the most well-liked and respected men in Mason, Hageman was a popular public speaker and an accomplished farmer. He won first place for his onions

and wheat at the Farmer's Fair in 1899. And his strawberry yields were bountiful and in demand.

In many ways R.S. Hageman was a town historian of sorts as he kept a daily journal that related day to day occurrences of life in the village. From weather to general observations to hard news, many entries from his journals are included in the *Around Mason* book.

When R.S. Hageman died in 1921 the simple funeral he requested, held at the Methodist Church, was attended by over 500 people. Hageman had a love of music, plant life and the advancement of education. An intelligent yet humble man, who helped steer Mason schools in the right direction.

## OH, THE FUN OF THE FAIR!

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

Fairs have been a part of this country since 1807 when Elkanah Watson exhibited European Iwo sheep under an old elm tree in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Watson drew such a crowd with his fine fuzzy sheep he thought bigger animals would draw even more attention. From that point forward, fairs celebrating agriculture have dotted the entire country, including Mason, Ohio.

Mason's first fair was in 1898. Initially sponsored by the Mason Appeal newspaper, it was called the "Farmers Jubilee". According to the *Western Star*, "The Appeal's Farmers Jubilee in Mason last Saturday was attended by an immense crowd which was admirably entertained, and everyone present seemed to have a good time."

Located in "Wikoff Woods", roughly where the Grace Baptist Church sits



Rev. Hageman (in dark hat) drives his friends along W. Main, en route to the fairgrounds at Wikoff Woods for the Mason Centennial festivities, 1915. He was a teacher, preacher, farmer, historian, and the first superintendent for Mason Schools.

*story continues on page 3*

# THE "FLIGHT PATH" OF THE COMETS

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

Did you ever wonder how the Mason team name became the Comets? Well, we did as well. Turns out in the early 1940s, there was an essay contest for the entire student body to come up with a name for the basketball team. Previous to this time, Mason athletes were referred to collectively as the "Green and White." The first place winner, Charles Fryer, campaigned for the "Towers" presumably because of WLW and the Voice of America, which were the pride of Mason at that time. However, the principal or teacher-in-charge thought that the moniker was too stationary and it needed to be something with motion.

The 2nd place essay by (Virgil) Nelson Shurts for "Comets" was then selected. Nelson received the grand prize of...the honor of coming up with the name!

The first mention of the new team name was in the 1944 Masonian on the basketball team page. It simply stated, "The Mason Hi Comets set many records this year."

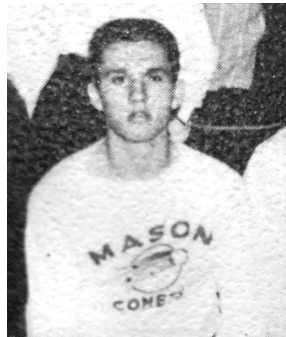
And in the 76 years since then, the Comets have continued to shoot for the stars!



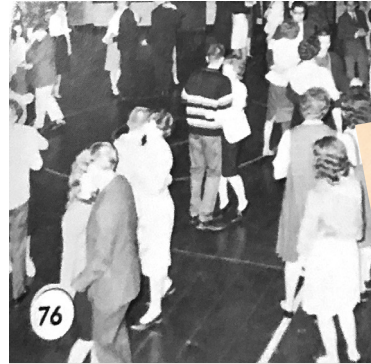
The first comet artwork (a simple hand-drawn illustration) was printed on the 1946 yearbook cover.



Nelson Shurts, the "father of the Comet name" (left) and school friend Alvin Voorhis at the Shurts home on N. St. Rte. 42, c. 1945.



This student shows his team spirit in 1952 with early custom apparel.



In the 1950s, students and townspeople hung out at the Comet Club, a social gathering at the old Municipal building. It offered an enjoyable evening of good, clean fun. No booze or smoking was allowed.

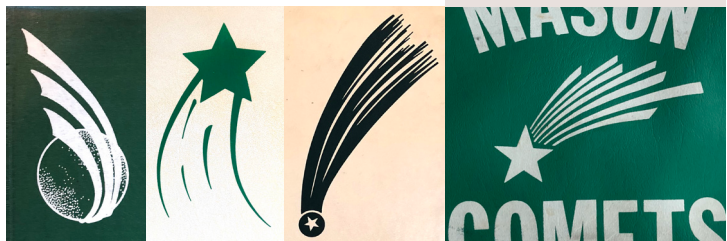


The "Year of the Comet" Masonian in 1986 celebrated the 100th graduating class, the 50th yearbook, and the return of Halley's comet.



In 1980, senior art student Clara Muennich designed a "fire-streaking" Comets logo (top) that was painted on the football team's helmets, the gym wall and the Dwire Field sign. By 2010, this logo was updated (bottom) and is in use today.

Different versions of logos with a star and streaks came into use in the late 1950s through the 1970s.



Comet logos from yearbook covers (l-r): 1957, 1958, 1965; far right Star and streaks logo from c. 1970 gym bag

## Did You Know...?

The Museum archives nearly all Mason High School yearbooks from 1936 to the present. Come on in and take a look. They are a fun trip down memory lane.

Thanks to the late John Fox for his 2003 recollections of the school contest. Thanks also to Sherri Reed Federle for documenting the story. 2

## OH, THE FUN OF THE FAIR!, cont.

today on Mason Road, the fairgrounds were initially developed for horse racing. This activity continued and was said to be the most popular attraction at the fairs.

By 1901 "The Mason Fair" offered livestock, produce, dairy and other farm goods for sale. Held for 2-3 days, it also included music, games of skill and chance, prettiest baby contests and special attractions.

In 1908 the fair thrilled visitors with a hot air balloon exhibit. The Warren County Appeal reported: "As a special attraction the balloon ascension easily ranked first. The pesky thing could not be inflated Friday, so the aeronaut promised to make two flights on Saturday. That afternoon the two pilots took off their



coats and worked like Trojans for two hours or more and then, when the bag was two thirds inflated, it took fire and was entirely destroyed." Oh my!

Sadly, The Mason Fair ended in 1915. The fair had left town but the memory of the excitement and entertainment the fair brought to the small village of Mason remains.

## The Board Report

Jay Meibers, President



The Dog Days of Summer are upon us as we quickly work our way towards the Fall and hopefully a Covid-19 vaccine soon after. We were able to open the Alverta Green Museum on July 9 with the proper Covid-19 safety requirements in place. I hope that the museum can remain open as we begin to see increased Covid-19 cases in Ohio and the Tri-State area.

Due to numerous safety and Ohio guideline requirements regarding Covid-19, the board has voted to cancel the Ice Cream Social this year. We were hoping that by moving the ICS to late August we would be in a situation that we could ensure the safety of all members and visitors attending. Unfortunately, with the fluid Covid-19 situation we

felt for the safety of all involved it was best to cancel the ICS this year. Hopefully, next year we will be back to normal and the ICS will be once again enjoyed by all.

The board also has concerns and challenges related to executing the Cemetery Walk this year due to Covid-19 implications. The board will finalize a decision on whether we move forward with the Cemetery Walk or not in the next few weeks and we will keep you updated.

The Ice Cream Social & Cemetery Walk are two of our major fundraisers and will have a major negative impact on our income level for 2020, especially if both are cancelled. A third major fundraiser is the raffle which we will be finalizing soon and sending tickets to members in August. Especially this year, please consider purchasing the raffle tickets. First, you may just win a prize and secondly it will help us with our revenue stream during this very challenging year. As always, thank you for your great support & stay well!

## THIS MONTH IN MASON HISTORY

Excerpt from *Around Mason, Ohio:*  
A Story, Rose Marie Springman, ©1986.

**1827:** William Mason sold a lot to the newly appointed area school directors. They were acting in compliance with the new state law for public education and had received money to start a free public school. The lot was to be the site of the town school for the next 85 years.

**1868:** The township trustees purchased ten acres of land on Section Road just south of Muddy Creek for a cemetery which was to stay in the township trustees' control. Peter W. Wikoff was paid \$2,000 for the property to be called Rose Hill Cemetery. Charles H. Shurts, age two, died August 24, and was thought to be the first burial there. (Current cost for one cemetery plot is \$2,000.)

**1911:** The contract to build the new school was signed with the Bender Company of Hamilton, Ohio, for

\$27,600 and construction began immediately. It was to be ready for occupancy by the 1912 school term.

**1915:** The Mason Horse Rangers celebrated its 65th anniversary. A parade of 140 men and women on horseback, 92 carriages and rigs and 65 automobiles moved through the full length of the village and ended at the old fairground woods where the whole group had a picnic. It was to be the last such large gathering for the Horse Rangers since the group was gradually diminishing.

**1963:** The school board decided to offer \$565 toward the cost of lights for the football field. A dedication for the installation was held on August 24 and the Booster Club sponsored a lawn fete which gave them \$600 toward the debt.

Joe Nuxhall of the Cincinnati Reds was the guest speaker of the Mason Kiwanis Club. He addressed the Knothole Baseball Champs that the Kiwanis had sponsored that summer.

# A HISTORY OF GILBERT'S

Keith Gilbert and Karen Gilbert Bodenbender

Gilbert's store was owned and operated by wife and husband, Frances and Bill Gilbert. Originally it was known as "Gilbert's Dry Goods" and later became "Gilbert's Department Store".

It opened on February 16, 1946, at 212 West Main St. The store was acquired from Bill's dad, Les Gilbert, who started a small general store during World War II. On the first floor, was the display area and a back room for storage of extra merchandise that was on display in the front and lay-aways. The second floor of the building was used for storage of display equipment. Items sold in the store included men's, women's and children's clothing, toys, yard goods and sewing needs. During the early days, family stories have



212 West Main Street Store, 1952

it, that some empty boxes for items were displayed on the shelves for items not in inventory. If someone wanted to purchase these items, Frances would travel to Cincinnati and pick them up at the wholesalers.

At one point, the Feed Store building at 107 West Main St. (Subway address today) started being used for toys at Christmas and toy lay-aways. On the first floor, in the front room was the sleigh.

Walker's Feed Supply building used as a seasonal toy store, c. 1950



Billy Gilbert



Frances Hudson

Billy Gilbert and Frances Hudson, 1936 Mason graduates, were high school sweethearts.

Santa would be there, and Mason photographer June Hill took photos of children with Santa.

In 1957, Frances and Bill purchased the Feed Store property from Frances' father, Frank Hudson. The old Feed Store building was razed, and a new building was constructed. The store was opened in the new building on November 4, 1957 and remained open until Bill and Frances retired and closed the business in July 1988.

Beginning about 1970, Gilbert's became an authorized Singer Sewing Machine Sales and Service location and Singer sewing machines, cabinets and other Singer Company merchandise was sold. The sewing machines were delivered to the purchaser's home and set up. Basic operating instructions were provided in the store.



107 West Main Street Store, c. 1970. Currently a Subway restaurant.

The April 3rd, 1974 Tornado removed the roof of the store and caused other damage. During the building repairs, the merchandise was moved to the Yost Building and business continued. On July 1st, the store operations returned to 107 West Main.

Many local people worked in the store at one time or another. They include Dixie Vermillion, Mary Berner, Jewel Pierson, Carrie Lockard, Mabel Burke, Sally Henninger, Lola Morton, Pat McCarnan, Betty Schmitz, John Ryan, Karen Gilbert and Keith Gilbert. Frances also "drafted" her grandchildren, Debbie, David,

*story continues on next page*

## A HISTORY OF GILBERT'S, cont.

Diane and Derek Bodenbender to assist during the annual store inventory. Their least favorite task was counting all the buttons. After the tornado, Doris and Karl Bodenbender helped with the cleanup. Doris washed and dried fabric. There are probably many more people that helped in the store, but those are all that Karen and I can recall.

The window displays were prepared by Bill. For holidays and special events, the windows had appropriate themes. During the country's Bicentennial celebration, patriotic displays were presented.

During the Mason Sesquicentennial in 1965, a scene with an old fireplace, a spinning wheel, butter churn, rocking chair and other items were used to represent an earlier life-style. These items were provided by Mason residents for the display.



Bill Gilbert (far right) and his Gilbert's bowling team, members of the Masoniters League at Mason Bowl, 1972-73.

Every February, there was a display for Boy Scout Week. In 1951, when the store was still at 212 West Main, Bill prepared a display for the National Crochet Week Display Contest and was awarded an Honorable Mention in the Independent Store Group by the National Needlecraft Bureau, Inc.

Gilbert's sponsored several sports teams. They were sponsors of the first Class "D" Knothole Baseball team in Mason for boys aged 8 thru 10 (see team photo page 6). The team was League Champions for five years: 1960, 1961, 1962, 1964 & 1965, District Champs 1960-1962 and were Runners Up in 1964 & 1965. Dale Burnside was the Manager. Gilbert's also sponsored a Men's Bowling Team. They were League Champions 1962 and 1963. Thomas Kennedy was the Team Captain.

Gilbert's was a member in National Federation of Independent Business and a charter member of the Mason Businessmen's Organization. Gilbert's was also a Sustaining Member of the Mound Builders' Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

Bill and Frances Gilbert were life-long residents of Mason and charter members of the Mason Historical Society.



Sesquicentennial window display with Karen Gilbert, 1965.



USA Bicentennial window display, 1976.

Happy Retirement, Frances and Bill!

(front row, L-R) Betty Schmitz, Jewel Pierson, Pat McCarnan, Mary Berner; (back row) Bill Gilbert, Keith Gilbert, Carrie Lockard, Frances Gilbert.

Gilbert's closed on May 20, 1989, after 44 years in business.



Bill and Frances Gilbert, 1994.

# THE DIAMOND FROM BEHIND THE PLATE

## Umping in the 70s

By Chris Meibers, edited by Gina Burton Arens

I left Mason for good back in 1984. I completed my 4-year stint with Uncle Sam's army in '80, returned home, got a job, started college on the G.I. Bill, fell in love, got married, got my degree in Computer Science and headed to Florida.

My parents moved into Mason Meadows in 1953. With six boys constantly playing one sport or the other, it's easy to see how sports played a huge part in my upbringing. Who I am today was formed largely by the people I met through sports.

While still in high school, 1973-1974, I had the opportunity to head up the umpires for the Mason Amateur Athletic Assn (MAAA). George Kleinman was the head of MAAA and lived in the Meadows too, right around the block from where I lived.

Each week I had a list of games and I had to find people to ump them. I had plenty of friends interested in making money, so I never had trouble filling the schedule. Plate umpires got \$6, base umpires \$4. Most games were done in less than 2 hours, so it was easy money. Back in the 70's making \$10-\$20 a week wasn't a bad gig.

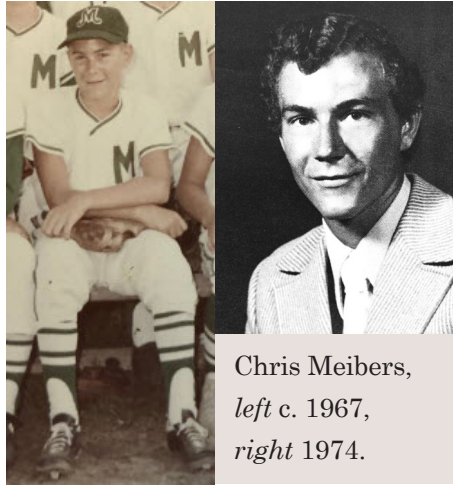
I remember carting the umpiring equipment from George's shed to our house, so it was available for the umpires scheduled each night or Saturday afternoon. I would deliver the equipment to Heritage Park, drop off 2 new baseballs to each plate umpire and then go to my assigned game since I umpired a game just about every night. At the end of the night I would collect the equipment, clean it up best I could, then drive home and do it all over again the next night.

At the beginning of each season, I met with the umpires to spell out expectations and leave them with one word of advice. For the first 2-3 weeks of the season, if anyone gives you any lip, give them the boot! I felt it was important to set a standard early on as some of the guys were inexperienced and some coaches tended to take advantage of that.

For the most part, I think we did well. We hardly ever had issues with the kids; they just wanted to play. Back then, as it is today, too many parents see their kids playing in Williamsport or signing a MLB contract.

Once after I had ejected a guy, he intentionally drove off the road and ran over my equipment. I wasn't ever in harm's way, but he was definitely sending a message. This guy was one of my 'regulars' and after

that game I spoke to George and he was banned from the park for the rest of the year.



Chris Meibers,  
left c. 1967,  
right 1974.

In time, as I started coaching my own kids. I would begin each year explaining to parents my philosophy, which guaranteed all kids played multiple positions and no less than 5 innings a game. Granted, that probably cost us some games, but I never had a kid quit my team in all the years I coached.

Some memories of umping are simply unforgettable. One Saturday, my brother Larry, my 'go to' man for T-Ball games at the Meadows Park, recalled a kid who went up to his coach, said

something, coach nods and the kid makes a beeline for the creek. He scuttles down the 5-foot embankment, drops his drawers and gets to business. Within a few minutes there is a line-up of kids following suit, all standing there with their colored shirts and hats, pants down at the ankles. Classic Mason Meadows story.

And then there was the time I umpired an MAAA championship game for my brother Jay's team. It was a classic pitcher's duel with not much scoring. Jay and Mike Simon were pretty dominating on the mound.

*story continues on next page*



Gilbert's Department Store sponsored this Class "D" Knothole Baseball Team, 1963.

*L-R: kneeling:* Charlie Andrews, Joe Ranson.

*first row:* Nick Blenke, Danny Middleton, Bobby Bowling, Randy Andrews, Dennis Saylor, Mike Fields, Glen Sims.

*back row:* Wayne Whitis, Jeff Winston, Gary Miller, Danny Grau, Jerry Ranson, Bobby Christianson.

*coaches:* Norb Koepfle, Dale Burnside, Hiram Andrews.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If you have any thoughts you would like to share regarding Mason history, please submit them to "Letters to the Editor."

You can mail these to the museum or email them to [mason.oh.historical@gmail.com](mailto:mason.oh.historical@gmail.com)



*Regarding the interesting feature on Bert Scofield ... My Grandpa John Barr (1885-1972), who was a Mason councilman, Deerfield Twp. trustee and Warren County commissioner, was orphaned at age 11. He was later "taken in" by Bert Scofield. My dad was named Joseph Elbert Barr – the middle name after Bert!*

Tom Barr

Tom graduated from MHS in '76. The American Legion Post 194 in Mason is named for his father, WWII hero, Joe Barr.

Regarding last month's story on Al-Char

*Al-Char was an oasis of relief for me and my brother Jim after helping grandpa put up hay, mend fences or push mowing their big yard. We lived across the street from their main house. We rode our bikes down their driveway and on a dirt road past the fishing lakes to the pool. Albert & Charlotte let us swim for free.*

*The pool was bowl shaped and sloped gradually to the deep end. A diving board in the middle of the pool was unique. To use the board, you had to be able to swim. Waiting in line to dive taught you how to tread water. You could swim under water through the supports, but the lifeguards didn't like you doing that.*

*We usually got an ice cream sandwich while there. I don't remember ever putting on sunscreen. It was a great place for us during the summer months. Good times!*

Paul Finke

Paul's grandfather, Fred Stagge, lived across the street from Al-Char. Paul graduated from MHS in '75 and is retired from the US Forest Service. He now lives in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky.

## THE DIAMOND FROM BEHIND THE PLATE, cont.

Late in the game, with the other team leading by a run, Jay comes up to bat with two outs and runners in scoring position.

It was, without question, the pivotal point in the game. The count got down to 3-2 and Mike lets the pitch fly. It is knee high and paints the outside corner, Jay flinches to swing and holds back. I can recall thinking this call can go either way, and I really did not want to call strike three on my brother.

I hesitated, stood straight, threw my right hand out and yelled strike three! I felt terrible but it was the right call and what really stuck in my mind, even to this day, was Jay looking at me, smiling and saying, "I should have swung at that one". Classic Jay.



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Brick orders are only placed a few times a year so now is the time to order! Brick purchases not only honor an individual, family or organization but help support the Mason Historical Society.

Bricks may be ordered through our website; go to "Support Us," select "E-Commerce," then select "Gift Shop Items." Or call the Museum for assistance. Engraved bricks are \$50.

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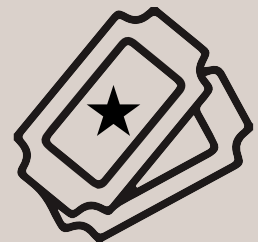
## Did You Know...

One of the brightest comets in history (and by far, the brightest in the 20th century) was the Ikeya-Seki comet which appeared in 1965.

The famed Halley's comet appears every 75-76 years. It is the only short-period comet which is visible to the naked eye from Earth and might be sighted twice in a lifetime. Author and satirist Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, was born during Halley's appearance in 1835. In 1909 Twain wrote, "I came in with Halley's comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it." His premonition proved correct as he died on April 21, 1910, as Halley's comet once more streaked through the sky.



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